

# BLINDFOLDED

A Mystery Story  
of San Francisco

BY

BARLE ASHLEY WALCOTT

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It meant anything it meant that I was to meet the Unknown, and perhaps to search the heart of the mystery. I had been heavy with fatigue and drowsy with want of sleep, but at the thought the energies of life were more fresh within me.

The men had waited a minute for me as I read the note.

"Go to your rooms and get some rest," I said. "I am called away. Trent will be in charge, and I will send word to him if I need any of you."

They looked at me in blank protest. "We're not going alone, sir?" cried others in a tone of alarm.

"Oh, no. But I shall not need a guard," I hoped heartily that I did not.

The men shook their heads doubtfully, and I continued:

"Gentlemen will be down from the Central Station in 15 or 20 minutes. Just before I've been sent for and to come to-morrow if he can make it in time."

And bidding them good night I ran lightly down the stairs before any of the men could frame his protest.

"Are you ready, sir?" asked the messenger.

"This close on half-past twelve," I answered. "Where is she?"

"It's not far away," said my guide, earnestly.

I understood the danger of speed and did not press for an answer.

The plumed down Montgomery street in the teeth of the wind that drove the spray in our faces at once, and I felt an instant the better to resist the onrush and then leaped at the man behind me with the intention of reaching the door at the end of the block.

The street was dark except for the newspaper offices, which glowed with light on both sides of the way, lit with the only signs of life in the storm and the midnight hour.

With the lighted buildings behind me I turned down California street, halfway down the block, in front of the Merchants' Exchange, stood a man. At the sight my heart beat fast and my breath came quick.

As we neared the back my guide gave a short, suppressed whistle, and before me, flung open the door to the vehicle and motioned me forward. I had gone too far to retreat, and stepped into the back. Instead of following, the guide closed the door gently. I heard him mount the seat with the driver, and in a moment we were in motion.

Was I alone? I had expected to find the Unknown, but the dark interior showed no sign of a companion. A slight movement made me certain that some one sat in the father corner of the carriage. The situation became a little embarrassing. Was it my place to speak first? I wondered. At last I could endure the silence no longer.

"Quite as unpleasant evening," I remarked politely.

There was a rustle of movement, and a short gasp, and a soft, pleasant voice broke on my ear.

"Mr. Dudley—can you forgive me?"

The astonishment I felt to hear my name once more—the name that seemed now to belong to a former state of existence—was swallowed up in the magnetic tones carried their way to my mind. I was stricken dumb for a moment at the discovery that had brought. Then I gasped:

"Mrs. Knapp?"

"Mrs. Knapp," she said with a beautiful laugh. "Did you never sus-

pect just the wonder and confusion, and even yet could not understand.

"What brings you out in this cold?" I asked, completely mystified. "I thought I was to meet another person."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Knapp, with a slight animation. "Well, I am the other person."

"But?" I exclaimed at last. "Are you the protector of the boy? The daughter?" Then I stopped, the tangled mind beginning to straighten out.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Knapp gently.

"What?" I cried, "who is he? what is he? what is the whole dreadful affair about?" and what?

Mrs. Knapp interrupted me. "What tell me what has become of Henry Wilton?" she said with some bitterness.

The dreadful scene in the alley faded before my mind.

"He is dead."

"Dead? And how?"

—IF—

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"Murdered."

"I feared so—I was certain, or he would have let me know. You have much to tell me. But first, did he leave no papers in your hands?"

I brought out the slip that bore the blind diagram and the blinder description that accompanied it. Nothing could be made of it in the darkness, so I described it as well as I could.

"We are on the right track," said Mrs. Knapp. "Oh, why didn't I have that yesterday? But here—we are at the wharf."

My guide was before us, and we followed him down the pier, struggling against the gusts.

"Do we cross the bay?" I asked, as Mrs. Knapp clung to my arm. "It's not safe for you in a small boat."

"There's a tug waiting for us," Mrs. Knapp explained.

A moment later we saw its lights, and the fire of its engine room shot a cheerful glow into the storm. The little vessel swung uneasily at its berth as we made our way aboard, and with shouts of men and clang of bells it was soon tossing on the dark waters of the bay.

The cabin of the tug was fitted with a shelf-table, and over it swung a



THIS IS THE SAME SHE SAID AT LAST, IN PAUL AT LAST.

lamp of brass that gave a dim light to the little room. Mrs. Knapp seated herself here, spread out the paper I had given her and studied the diagram and the jumble of letters with anxious attention.

"It is the same," she said at last, "in part, at least."

"The same as what?" I asked.

"As the one I got word of to-night, you know," she replied.

"But," she continued, "this gives a different place. I was to go to the cross-road here—indicating the mark at the last branch."

"I'm glad to hear that," said I, taking out the diagram I had found in the citadel of the enemy. "This seems to point to a different place, too, and I really hope that the gentleman who drew this map is a good way off from the truth."

"Where did you get this?" exclaimed Mrs. Knapp.

I described the circumstances in as few words as I could command.

"They are ahead of us," she said in alarm.

"They have started first, I suppose," was my suggestion.

And they have the right road.

"Then our only hope is that they may not know the right place."

"God grant it," said Mrs. Knapp.

She was silent for a few minutes, and I saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

Then she said, "Now tell me about Henry Wilton—how he died and when."

I told the tale as it had happened, and as I told it I read in the face before me the varying emotions of alarm, horror and grief that were stirred by its incidents. But one thing I could not tell her. The wolf-face I had seen in the lantern flash in the alley I could not name nor describe to the wife of Doddridge Knapp.

Mrs. Knapp bowed her head in deep, gloomy thought.

"I feared it, yet he would not listen to my warnings," she murmured. "He would work his own way." They she looked me suddenly straight in the face.

"And why did you take his place, his name? Why did you try to do his work when you had seen the dreadful end to which it had brought him?"

I confessed that it was half through the insistence of Detective Coogan that I was Henry Wilton, half through the course of events that seemed to make it the easiest road to reach the vengeance that I had vowed to bring the murderer of my friend.

"You are bent on avenging him?" asked Mrs. Knapp thoughtfully.

"I have promised it."

"I have marveled at you," said Mrs. Knapp after a pause. "I marvel at you yet. You have carried off your part well."

"Not well enough, it seems, to deceive you," I said, a little bitterly.

"You should not have expected to deceive me," said Mrs. Knapp. "But you can imagine the shock I had when I saw that it was not Henry Wilton who had come among us that first night when I called you from Mr. Knapp's room."

"You certainly succeeded in concealing any surprise you may have felt," I said. "You are a better actor than I."

Mrs. Knapp smiled.

"It was more than surprise—it was consternation," she said. "I had been anxious at receiving no word from Henry. I suppose you got my notes. And when I saw you I was torn with doubts, wondering whether anything had happened to Henry."

"I didn't suppose I was quite so poor an impostor," I said apologetically, with a qualm at the word. "Though I did get some hint of it," I added, with a painful recollection of the candid statement of opinion I had received from the daughter of the house.

"Oh, you did very well," said Mrs. Knapp kindly, "but no one could have been successful in that house. Luella was quite outraged over it, but I managed to quiet her."

"I hope Miss Knapp has not retained the unfavorable impressions of—or—" I stammered in much confusion.

Mrs. Knapp gave me a keen glance. "You know she has not," she said.

"Well," continued Mrs. Knapp, "when I saw you and guessed that something had happened to Henry Wilton, and found that you knew little of what was going on, I changed the plan of campaign. I did not know that you were one to be trusted, but I saw that you could be used to keep the others on a false scent, for you deceived everybody but us."

"I would have spoken when I found you for what you are," said Mrs. Knapp, "but I thought until the Livermore trip that you could serve me best as you were doing."

"It was blind work," I said.

"It was blind enough for you, not for me. I was deceived in one thing, however; I thought that you had no papers—nothing from Henry that could help or hurt. The first night you came to us I had Henry's room thoroughly searched."

"Oh, I was indebted to you for that attention," I exclaimed. "I gave our friends of the other house the credit."

Mrs. Knapp smiled again.

"I thought it necessary. It was the chance that you did not sleep there that night that kept this paper out of my hands weeks ago."

"I have always kept it with me," I said.

"I did not need it till Sunday," continued Mrs. Knapp. "I have been worried much at the situation of the boy, but I did not dare go near him. Henry and I decided that his hiding place was not safe. We had talked of moving him a few days before you came."

"Then I found that Henry had disappeared. I was anxious to make the change, but I could not venture to attempt it until the others were out of town, for I knew I was watched. Then I was assured from Mother Borton that they did not know where the boy was hidden, and I let the matter rest. But a few days ago—on Saturday—she sent me word that she thought they had found the place. Then it came to me to send you to Livermore with the other boy—oh, I hope no harm came to the little fellow," she exclaimed anxiously.

"He's safe in my rooms in charge of Wainwright," I said. "He got back on the morning train, and can be had for the asking."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Mrs. Knapp. "I was afraid something would happen to him, but I had to take desperate chances. Well, you see my plan succeeded. They all followed you. But when I went to the hiding place the boy was gone. Henry had moved him weeks ago, and had died before he could tell me. Then I thought you might know more than you had told me—that Henry Wilton might have got you to help him when he made the change, and I wrote to you."

"And the key," I said, remembering the expression of the note. "Did you mean this diagram?"

"No," said Mrs. Knapp. "I meant the key to our cipher code. I was looking over Henry's letters for some hint of a hiding place and could not find the key to the cipher. I thought you might have been given one. I found nine this afternoon, though, and there was no need of it, so it didn't matter after all."

The pitching and tossing of the boat had ceased. And, a minute later, with clang of bells and groan of engine we were at the wharf and were helped ashore.

"Tell the captain to wait here for us with fires up," said Mrs. Knapp. "The carriage should be somewhere around here," she continued, peering anxiously about as we reached the foot of the wharf.

"This way," said a familiar voice, and a man stepped from the shadow.

"Dickie Nahl!" I exclaimed.

"Mr. Wilton!" mimicked Dickie. "But it's just as well not to speak so loud. Here you are. I put the hack's lights out just to escape unpleasant remark."

Mrs. Knapp entered the carriage and called to me to follow her.

I remembered Mother Borton's warnings and my doubts of Dickie Nahl.

"You're certain you know where you are going?" I asked him in an under tone.

"No, I'm not," said Dickie frankly. "I've found a man who says he knows where to meet him. We'll get there between 3 and 4 o'clock. He won't say another word to anybody but her or you. I guess he knows what he is about."

"Well, keep your eyes open. Meek's gang is ahead of us. Is the driver reliable?"

"Right as a judge," said Dickie cheerfully. "Now, if you'll get it with madame we won't be wasting time here."

I stepped into the carriage. Dickie Nahl closed the door softly and climbed on the seat by the driver, and in a moment we were rolling up Broadway in the gloomy stillness of the early morning hour.

(To be continued.)

Hatology.

Two heads, however, are not better than one when you are up against the necessity of buying a new hat.—Puck.

## WOMAN

Mme. Caro Roma,  
Writer, Composer,  
Prima Donna and  
Children's Favorite.  
Ex-Queens on a Lark

One of the most remarkable women of this country where women achieve is Mme. Caro Roma, writer, musical composer and prima donna soprano. Her career as a singer began when she was three years old in California, where she was born. Almost before she was out of her teens she was singing in the Tivoli Opera House in



MME. CARO ROMA.

Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" as prima donna. While still a child she wrote "Violets," which is still a favorite song. This was followed by over a hundred others which are favorites, among them "Resignation."

She has now an order for four books of songs for little children. Songs for children must be simple, sincere and direct, such as a child's mind can grasp. All these Mme. Roma is furnishing.

The field for Mme. Roma was as large as the world, and she went to Europe, appearing in many operas there with marked success and singing before many royal personages, receiving decorations from some of them as well as a gold medal from the citizens of music loving Boston. Many rare and beautiful presents were given her some being of great value from association, among them a rosary from one of the oldest missions in California and brought from Spain many centuries ago.

Widowed Queens on a Lark.

Queen Margherita of Italy and the dowager queen of Spain, both widows, have cut the strings which erstwhile bound them to court etiquette. Recently they handled their traveling traps with all the abandon of tourists and went off together in an automobile. They made a journey over the white roads of France with the freedom of a couple of schoolgirls. In order that they might enjoy the dashes all the more they journeyed incognito. They were not even attended by maids. One night their machine broke down. They applied at a shepherd's hut for shelter. They slept upon pallets of straw, for the shepherd had no beds in his hut. They enjoyed the episode and departed the following morning in happy moods.

The Only Woman Sporting Editor.

Miss Ina Louise Young of Trinidad, Colo., is the only woman editor of sports in the world. Of course she is an American girl. Her hobby is the American game, baseball, although she is an expert in "writing up" anything in the domain of sport except a prize fight. That she has yet to do, in her opinion, men who follow sporting life as a profession are the equal in courtesy and chivalry of those she has met in the higher walks. In her brief experience she has helped out new reporters of the opposite sex, and this she thoroughly enjoys. At present she is at the head of the sporting page of the Trinidad (Colo.) Chronicle-News.

Vassar Girl a Governor's Wife.

Mrs. Herbert S. Hadley, wife of the next governor of Missouri, is a new-comer in official life. She is all the more prominent because her husband is the first Republican governor of Missouri since the civil war.

Outside of her own set Mrs. Hadley is unknown to society, although her husband was attorney general of the state four years. Her time has been devoted to her husband's interests and his political ambition and to her children and her home. Her qualifications are said to be unlimited. She is a graduate of Vassar. She is tactful and conservative. She has a passion for music and is fond of the saddle when it is girthed to a spirited horse. She knows how to play a good hand at the card table and knows golf and tennis. But her fireside and the society of her husband and children come first. So unerring is her judgment that her husband recently paid her this tribute: "I never make an utterance of importance publicly that I do not first submit my ideas to my wife. Her intuition is marvelous."

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## The Arrival of the New Year

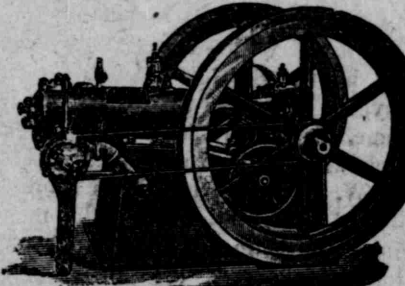
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